

Dear Legislators,

The Reasonable Childhood Independence bill is crucial for my family and for the children of Connecticut at large.

If you haven't already read my story (published at <https://reason.com/2022/12/30/new-britain-connecticut-mom-cps-cops-parents-kids-walk/>), I'll briefly summarize: One weekday morning in 2021, following my instructions, my daughter (then seven and a half) began walking home from my sister's house in our neighborhood; a suspicious crossing guard at a nearby school stopped her; the guard then called the police, who detained me and my child, involved my sister, and then called DCF, who opened a case against me and did not close it until making multiple home visits.

Was any of that necessary? Certainly not.

The ordeal was traumatic to me and my daughter. It was downright infuriating. There I was, being accused of--what?--allowing my child to walk home down the road, less than one mile, to her father who was waiting for her. And this was somehow a transgression?

My children are now homeschooled. But their education doesn't happen strictly *at* home; it comes from real world living. We are part of a growing movement of homeschool families in Connecticut who understand that children develop best when given age-appropriate independence. My kids deserve to use the public library, to play and socialize at the park, and go shopping on their own--they deserve to just *be* in the world--free from the suffocation of constant oversight. Only then will they blossom and become what they are meant to be: confident, capable adults.

There are also times when some independence is simply a necessity. I have obligations to help care for my disabled mother who lives across town. I'm pleased to say that my kids know how to get along without me for a while when I am serving her. There is no way that hiring a babysitter for these instances is feasible--neither logistically nor financially. *We are one of thousands of low-income families in the state who could never afford childcare.*

Nothing about parenting is easy. My husband works full time and then some. I keep the household and I also work part-time. I have four kids nine years apart. One of them has special needs. Parenting is stressful enough as it is! But on top of that, *we parents are daily oppressed by a fear that we will be "caught."* Why? *Because we are being scrutinized (and in my case, literally policed) like never before.* (I could provide anecdotes ad nauseum, like the librarian who vocally disapproved of my eleven year-old picking up a book she had reserved, or the Costco employee who reprimanded me for standing 20 feet away from my two year-old while he gently stroked a row of sparkly dresses.) It's hard to escape the sense that we are being watched for breaking the ever-tightening "rules," whether spoken or unspoken. As a professional in the field of maternal-child health, I've seen an alarming rise in anxiety among parents of newborns. Right from the start, there is an unnatural stricture placed on parents that degrades our mental health.

This bill isn't merely about nostalgia. Of course I want my children to do the same things I did as a child 30 years ago (when the world was empirically more dangerous, at that). But at the end of the day, kids need freedom. My kids need freedom. And parents need freedom from punishment for letting kids spread their wings. That's the way we will all thrive.

Sincerely,

Julie-Ann Toalston, BA, IBCLC
New Britain, Connecticut